

THE OLIVE PRESS

RAMALLAH FRIENDS SCHOOL MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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Realize Potential | Fulfill Dreams | Share Hope

Designed by: Mohamed A. Daoud | Editor in Chief: Besan Jaawan

www.rfs.edu.ps



Welcome Back to School

Letter from Head of School

I want to welcome our community back for a new academic year. We are currently in the process of preparing our programs to welcome our students back. We have all lived through a difficult time and we need to be prepared for more to come. With the outbreak of Coronavirus, a state of emergency was announced in Palestine at the beginning of March. Initially it was expected that RFS like other schools would remain closed for a month. March went by, as did April, May and then June and we remained closed for the rest of the academic year.

Several weeks ago it was announced that all schools would open again in September using a mix, depending on individual school circumstances, of face-to-face teaching and blended learning. The challenges appeared immense. How do we return to school with 1400 students and almost 200 staff and keep our community safe? Schools around the world are facing the same challenges.

Our planning has led us to decide that we will have full time face-to-face teaching in the kindergarten and elementary and blended learning in the upper school. Essential to all this is the hygiene of the school and the community. Social distancing and face masks are essential. Hand sanitizer will be deployed throughout the school and a strict cleaning regime will ensure constant sterilization of rooms, bathrooms, and educational equipment.



Elementary toys will be constantly cleaned. Students will have to be carefully supervised and teachers will have to be carefully trained before the first day.

Safety protocols are crucial so that we know what to do in an emergency. Everyone needs to know what to do and communication is essential. Teacher training has been intensified on both campuses, to help ready the school for the challenges ahead.

A year ago I was in Castleton at the New England Yearly Meeting. To be able to travel to such an event seems a life time ago. At the time I wrote that we do not travel on this journey alone, but that we need one another to fully hear God's desires for us. The journey given us is not any easy one. But we have each other and together we will remain strong. We are RFS. We realize potential, fulfill dreams and share hope.*

Adrian Moody - Head of School

Alumni in the Spotlight – Dema Totah

By Besan Jaawan – Development & Communications Manager

Meet RFS graduate and member of class of 2008, Dema Totah.

"My memories of RFS are filled with great friendships and dedicated teachers. The unique experiences and rigor of the RFS curriculum continued to challenge me and prepare me for higher education in an international setting." - This is how Dema speaks about her memories at RFS.

While juggling work and finishing her Ph.D. thesis and research, Dema also likes to practice voice acting in a recording booth she assembled in her own home. Her voice can be heard for 6 different characters in a children's learning application named STEM Buddies.

As a researcher, she has participated in a number of international conferences and through several scientific journal publications.

After graduating from RFS, Dema headed to MIT in the USA to study Mechanical Engineering. Then she received an M.S.E in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Michigan in 2014 and continued to pursue her Ph.D. in the areas of biomechanics and controls.



Dema plans to pursue an academic career in the bio mechatronics field hoping to improve patient outcomes through intelligent, sensor-integrated assistive technologies.

Her advice to future RFS graduates is not to forget *"to lift others along the way, especially those who may not have had the same advantages you did". **

School Mission & Quaker Values

Source: www.rfs.edu.ps

Ramallah Friends School Mission

Guided by Quaker principles and values, enriched by being in Palestine, and strengthened by collaboration within the school community and with external partnerships, Ramallah Friends School (RFS) offers children and youth with an academically rigorous, balanced, engaging and inclusive learning environment of the highest quality standard, every day.

We inspire our students to become a living expression of a spiritual life, and be in constant search for God in all human situations. By doing so, we nurture confidence and intellectual curiosity through experiential learning and innovative application of knowledge and skills, enabling our students to become independent, adaptable but principled, socially responsible, and internationally-minded citizens.

RAMALLAH FRIENDS SCHOOL strives to be a leading educational institution in the Palestinian community. The Lower and Upper Schools were founded in 1869 and 1901 respectively, for the purpose of offering Palestinian youth a rigorous program guided by Quaker principles.

Central to Quaker education is a vitality that comes from being a living expression of a religious life. A Friends School education seeks to promote a constant search for God to all human situations and to cultivate ethical, moral and spiritual values.

Living Our Quaker Values

FRIENDS SCHOOLS PLACE A PRIORITY ON TEACHING THE VALUES felt necessary for leading a life of service in the community. We seek to encourage our children to explore their individuality and their responsibility as school community members in the framework of a person of faith. Friends School staff seek to permeate the whole of our school life in each classroom with these values. The school staff seek to reward those who enhance the life of our school community and to encourage better behavior from those whose actions or words are unacceptable to us.

Simplicity

Friends believe that the most important things in life aren't things.

Peace

Friends believe that there is always a path that brings peace, justice, dignity and respect.

Integrity

Friends believe that our words and actions must reflect our truest selves.

Community

Friends believe that we need each other, since each and every one of us is precious to our community.

Equality

Friends believe that every person is equally beloved by God, no matter what.

Stewardship

Friends believe that all God's gifts are entrusted to us for the sake of future generations.*

A Look at Our History

1999

The School became accredited by the [International Baccalaureate Organization \(IBO\)](#), offering students in Palestine for the first time an [IB Diploma Program](#). Today, after receiving the IB authorization of the [Middle Years Program \(MYP\)](#) in 2012 (for grades 6 through 10), and the [Primary Years Program \(PYP\)](#) in 2018 (for grades LKG through 5th), the Ramallah Friends School is a recognized [IB World School](#).

2000

The second Intifada (Palestinian uprising) erupted in September 2000. RFS campuses in the center of Ramallah and El-Bireh were exposed to a new level of violence with sequences of nightly shelling from Israeli tanks and light artillery and attacks by helicopter gunners. The psychological well-being of our parents, students and staff was shaken and our enrollment figures fell to 370 pupils at the Upper School and 540 at the Lower School in 2000/2001 as families left for America and elsewhere to escape the violence.

2001

In May RFS students sat for the first official International Baccalaureate (IB) examinations and were the first Palestinian students to receive the IB Diploma in the West Bank. The Upper School campus celebrated its centennial 1901-2001.



In September, the Israeli army carried out an air strike on Ramallah, demolishing the police station then located adjacent to the Upper School campus. Several classrooms were damaged but fortunately no one was injured.

The position of School Director had been created to unilaterally manage both the Upper and Lower School. The Director was appointed by the Friends United Meeting (FUM) of Richmond, Indiana. The first such Director, Colin South, a Quaker and member of the British Yearly Meeting, served the School in this capacity from 2001-2004.*



By Sawsan Hamarshah
Lower School Nurse

Welcome back to a different and challenging school year. It is necessary to remember that COVID-19 is a new coronavirus that has been previously identified. It spreads mainly through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes and talks.

Hence, it is crucial to remember that adults play a significant role in spreading the coronavirus, in addition, children have a role in spreading it as well.

The best way to prevent illness is to avoid exposure to the virus. Protecting yourself and others from getting sick with this virus will be through mainly wearing a mask in public settings and when around people who don't live in the household, avoid close contact, wash hands and use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol, clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily and monitor your health daily.

Stay updated on the latest developments about COVID-19, follow advice given by competent authorities and the health care providers on how to protect yourself and others from COVID-19. *

Lower School Principal's Letter

By Frieda Dahdah-Khayat – Lower School

We ended the past school year under difficult circumstances due to COVID-19 virus. And we began preparing for the new school year 2020-2021 under the same circumstances; unprecedented challenges and measures. This pandemic has imposed an unusual style of opening schools and welcoming the new school year be it face to face learning or blended learning. Each of these scenarios contains different aspects and carries various details and needs to plan for, and all are very different from the traditional educational procedures and methods.

In addition to the educational planning, health and preventive planning now proceeds side by side with technical planning, and it is compatible to any new developments that may appear at any time according to the health protocols followed in facing this virus. To keep everything running smoothly, the school held preparation meetings with parents to keep them updated with the expected scenarios for the educational process as well as sending out a series of letters which detail and clarify the beginning of the school year, the distribution of students in learning spaces, drop-off and pick-up of students, and preparing school facilities all in accordance to social distancing and everyone's safety.

The current challenges have forced a new pattern on our school and on the teaching and educational process in its entirety and on all stakeholders involved including teachers, administrators, students and parents. Indeed, it has imposed social responsibility on all stakeholders in the school community, in terms of the importance of all sectors in supporting each other to be able to push the educational process forward and keep up



with the changing scene such as some logistic issues which have become the backbone of this transition, and this allows everybody to keep up with the pace of all the scenarios and changes.

Schools are now being run according to emergency plans in our performance, and our school has also adopted this plan which prepares us all for any sudden changes in the educational process of whatever the pandemic may persist. And all is taken into account to guarantee the safety of our school community because health is of the utmost importance.*

Upper School Principal's Letter

By Riyam Kafri – Upper School Principal

These are unprecedented times and we, as a community, find ourselves on uncharted territories. The upper school leadership, teaching faculty and admin staff have been working tirelessly since March. We have put together one scenario after another for students to return. The underlying theme and objective is students' safety and right to an education.

In the past two months, we worked on the ground to prepare school for blended learning. Since the beginning of August, we engaged in discussions with teachers on what learning will look like for the first semester.

Additionally, not only did we write protocols but actually worked on campus to physically measure distances between desks, went on numerous walk-throughs to understand student traffic movement upon arrival, during the day and at dismissal. We established one way hallways and staircases. We designated bathrooms and building exits

and entrances. And we then proceeded to train faculty on COVID-19 safety and health protocols. We are ready, racing time it seems, but ready.

Our plan previously announced last week was to pursue Blended Learning. However, we have to change our plans per the Palestinian Government decision to postpone the start date of blended learning for grades 6-10 until September 20th. *



When everything seems dark, consider you may be the light.
Quaker Proverb

02.295.22.86 tel
02.295.83.20 fax

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Editor in Chief:
Besan Jaawan

Translation by Besan Jaawan.

Design, photos and graphics by
Besan Jaawan, Mohamed Dawud.

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Middle School Library Corner

By Carmen Abdul Hadi – Middle School Librarian

"A smooth sea never made a skilled sailor."

It's been an adventurous ride since last time we had you filling the school with your laughter... The ride is still on... With experiences of all kinds.

It's another way of welcoming you back to school this fall...but we're moving forward, thinking of new ideas and trying new things out.

We wanted to let you know that we're still here for you even though our buildings might be sometimes closed. There are lots of ways you can still access library resources and get involved in new activities and events online.

Remember Harry Potter's friend, Ron? Ron Weasley sums it up well in Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets: "But why's she got to go to the library?" "Because that's what Hermione does," said Ron, shrugging. "When in doubt, go to the library."

Even if it's the physical or virtual library ([press here to reach RFS Middle School Virtual Library](#)), reading is a fantastic way for anyone of any age to escape the prison of their four walls and get away.

Can't wait to see your masked, beautiful faces! *

Integrity Community Peace
Quaker Quotes
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My best language has always come out of silence.

Carrie Newcomer
Quaker Songwriter & Performer

Discover QuakerHistory.org

RAMALLAH FRIENDS SCHOOL

WELCOME BACK TO SCHOOL

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